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ABSTRACT

Preserving a literary-based curriculum, creating a sensitivity to the literature, and encouraging communicative skills relative to the literature are significant goals in foreign language study. Therefore, a program involving strategic interaction and cooperative learning techniques applied to the study of literature fosters communication and comprehension within a cultural context. Three categories of relative, effective, and practical tools for literary based discourse are discussed in this report: (1) scenarios chosen for enactment (an idea or theme from a portion of the targeted literature with undetermined resolution, juxtaposed role playing and significant debriefing) and situations (the cafe scene, family dinners, etc., with a beginning, denouement, and predetermined conclusion); (2) serious silliness ("ice-breaker" inter-social devices); and (3) six sombreros (the class is divided into five groups; the "white hat" group is responsible for the facts and details of the reading; the "red hat" students are concerned with the emotions and feelings offered by the text; those wearing "purple hats" confirm negative dimensions in the passage; "green hats" are challenged to think creatively; and finally, the "blue hats" organize and summarize the thoughts produced by each of the other groups). The implementation and expansion of some already practiced devices offer new possibilities within the literacy framework. (VWL/AA)

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INTERACTIVE PEDAGOGY IN A LITERATURE BASED CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Preserving a literary-based curriculum, creating a sensitivity to the literature, and encouraging communicative skills relative to the literature are significant goals in foreign language study. Therefore, a program involving strategic interaction and cooperative learning techniques applied to the study of literature fosters communication and comprehension within a cultural context.

Three categories of relative, effective, and practical tools for literary based discourse will be discussed in the paper: 1) scenarios and situations, 2) serious sillinesses, and 3) six sombreros. The implementation and expansion of some already practiced devices offers new possibilities within the literary framework.

What we know about how we learn "argues for interactive rather than language based reading" (Swaffar, Arens, and Byrnes 1991: 53). Certainly, a program involving strategic interaction and cooperative learning techniques applied to a literary-based classroom fosters both communicative and comprehension skills within a cultural context. Three categories of relative, effective, and practical tools for literary based discourse will be discussed in this paper: 1) scenarios and situations, 2) serious sillinesses, 3) and six sombreros. It is understood that same segments of the examples presented are not necessarily innovative. It is the implementation and expansion of the same within a literary framework that offers new possibilities.

Students should be aware of the association between "culturally conditioned images" (Seely 1984: 71) and the vocabulary or phrasing in the target language. This association includes the relationship to the entire scope of the language's literature. Context is essential; background knowledge exists within a socio-psychological framework. Within this framework, the language learner already has a great deal of common sense about the world (Nattinger 1984: 393). It is obvious that discussion of the literature in any given L1 must evoke the background of the reader. Discussion of the literature in L2, however, requires that the student practice soci-linguistic patterns in addition to showing any literature knowledge. Although the language necessary for analytical thinking "involves a sophisticated use of grammar and vocabulary as well as organizational and logical thinking skills" (Schultz 1991: 979), the schism between intermediate and advanced levels of L2 (where often the "study" of literature suddenly appears) is not only a problem of sophistication with grammar, vocabulary and analysis, but also with experience: linguistic and lived. Thus it is important to create at least a minimal experience for the literature in L2 so that the student's facility with both language and cultural sensitivity will be augmented. As Swaffer, Arens, and Burns (1991: 73) suggest.

> "Without sensitivity to the text's cultural preconditions, even advanced students tend to register facts, but fail to register the textual inferences ..." (Swaffar, Arens, Byrnes 73).

An interactive pedagogy augments the students' broader comprehension through unique participation.

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Scenarios and Situations

The scenario, is a combination of juxtaposed role playing, undetermined resolution, and significant debriefing (Di Pietro 1983). It is an interesting, and active tool for the production of realistic discourse from a literary base. From a portion of the targeted literature, instructors choose an idea or theme to be treated in the scenario. They then write the roles relative to a problem within the theme. There are usually two roles per scenario, but some effective scenarios can be treated with three or even four roles. If the class is large, the instructor creates several scenarios concerning the same theme. In writing the roles, the instructors provide information exclusive to that role.

For the scenario, the class is divided into as many groups as there are roles; if there are two scenarios, each with two roles, there will be four groups. The students receive their group's role in written form. Together they assess the requirements of the role; they discuss how they will develop this specific role, what vocabulary they will need, and what strategy they will execute.

After a time specified for preparation of the role, one student is selected from each group to play out the role. The role player may be chosen by an instructor or by the group members. If the same group is maintained for several weeks' duration and multiple scenarios are worked, it is likely that the students, legitimately imposing fairness, will themselves rotate the role player so that all students have an opportunity to perform.

During the performance, the remainder of each group (the non-performing members) coaches the acting team member concerning the strategy to use as additional information is revealed through the opposite role. The coaches offer suggestions to the performer as required. If the performers are truly perplexed, they may signal a *time out* in order to consult privately with fellow group members. The *time out* is limited to a minute so as not to severely interrupt the problem solving process now set in motion. In the best interest of the involvement of all students the number of the *time outs* is also limited.

If the coaching group is small enough and capable of articulate stage whispers, they may vocalize their suggestions (in the target language) directly to the performer without a *time out*. Often, the coaching group may be more sagacious and linguistically adept than the performer as the spectators observe the trend of the interaction. Therefore, they may call out suggestions for the discourse in a rather excited fashion. Such enthusiasm for the task has a positive, effect this facilitates the performance, and assures linguistic processing for the non-performing students.

The scenario is played out until some type of resolution occurs, e.g., the settlement of the problem evoked by the differences of agenda generated from the roles. Numerous factors may influence the resolution including: 1) the language skills of the of the performer, and the coaching abilities of the entire group; 2) the personality and persistence of the performers. A capable student who is not interested in arguing a point may defer to a less linguistically talented student whose persistence will force the confrontation and thus the discourse. In one form or another, resolution will occur as long as time is sufficient to permit its occurrence. The time required to conclude with resolution is not absolutely predictable.

Using François de Chateaubriand's *René* as literary reference point, we shall describe specific appropriate scenarios. One of the themes of this "mal du siecle" novel is that of suicide. The following could be used to treat this theme in the target language.

Rôle A:

Vous venez de recevoir un coup de téléphone de l'hôpital où se trouve votre fille parce qu'elle a essayé de se suicider. Vous lui parlez. Elle insiste que vous ne disiez rien de cette situation. Vous revenez chez vous pour y réfélechir.

Rôle B:

Vous avez une amie qui semble être déçue...triste. Elle ne veut plus sortir avec ses amis. Elle se retire. Vous téléphonez à sa mére pour lui demander si elle avait constaté ces changements.

When the preparation has finished, the two group come together; the chosen role players are set to commence. The instructor simply introduces the forthcoming drama as a phone conversation. At the direction of the instructor, the friend initiates the call.

The struggle occurs because the friend (Rôle B) is attempting to discover more information about the daughter; the mother (Rôle A), respecting her daughter's request, will respond to the friend's inquiries while still preserving her daughter's privacy. However, another dimension will affect the progression of the discourse: that of emotion. The mother is forced to maintain a calm demeanor as the questions and concerns are posed. The mother may have a greater need to share her feelings as well. It is clear that the performers will need to use various tenses and sentence types in order to carry out the scenario. Also significant will be the numerous strategies and coping mechanisms required to reach a resolution.

There is not a tangible goal for the conclusion of this scenario. One is neither buying nor selling. It is informational acquisition which is the asset in dealing with the emotional upheaval of the three lives. The mother may or may not release the ultimate information, but it is obvious that emotions will have to be considered.

The preparation and role playing for this scenario will probably require the hour duration of a given class period. Debriefing will require at least two class periods or more (if the scenario has been especially successful in provoking discussion). The syntactical and morphological debriefing will occupy minimal time and is easily integrated at this level into the content discussion. The content discussion regarding the theme of suicide now has a relevant foundation as both role players and team members can make a better association with the involvement in suicide. Who becomes involved in the problem? Were you as participants/observers angry or sad? Should the daughter's wishes have been respected? Was the daughter's request a fair one?

Students might also be asked to imagine that they were Amélie (René's sister) listening to René's serious ramblings about the frustrations and boredom of his life. They may be asked to parallel the vocabulary used in their scenario to that of the actual text. From these discussion questions, motivated by the scenario, the instructor now makes the transition to the text. Because the students have now had a simulated contact with the theme, there is actually a greater basis for meaningful discussion.

Another event in the novel is Amélie's entrance into a religious order. René is Amélie's only living relative; they are dear friends, and René is devastated by the prospect of Amélie's departure. The following scenario, albeit on a lighter note, might serve as an introduction to the reading containing René's response to this announcement.

> Rôle A:
>
> Vous sortez avec Pierre depuis deux ans. Vous l'aimez beaucoup; il avait indiqué qu'il voulait se marier avec vous. Ce soir vous allez dîner ensemble...à un bon restaurant. Vous vous attendez bience soir parcè que peut être va-t-il parler du mariage.
>
> Rôle B:
>
> Vous sortez avec Marie depuis deux ans. Elle est très sympa, intelligente, élégante, etc. Vous l'aimez beaucoup, mais depuis plusieurs mois vous réfléchissez á devenir prêtre. En effet, vous avez pris la décision de faire vos études au séminaire. Marie va dîner avec vous ce soir à son restaurant préféré; vous devez lui parler de vos intentions.

Once again, the outcome of this scenario is not clearly predictable. The emotions of hurt and anger should surface. A strong Rôle A might be able to persuade Rôle B to change his plans. A spiritual dimension may be encouraged. Both structure and vocabulary will vary depending upon the route the role players assume.

The *situation*, a long-standing pedagogical device in L2 elementary levels (the café scene, family dinners, introductions, etc.) is rooted in the idea of a play. There is a beginning, dénouement, and predetermined conclusion. Unlike the scenario, all the performers know what to say and when to say it. The situation does not evoke the normality of expression that the scenario fosters. However, given parameters that are not too rigid, the *situation* can also provoke sensitivity, establish a mood, and give the student a contextual growth experience within the L2. The *situation* need not resemble the "dialogue" that has been the main stay of numerous beginning and intermediate texts. Students create and write their own situations based on a very broad directive. The written creation is skeletal so that students do not depend entirely on a written script, which often reduces fluency during the performance, produces little discourse and alienates the audience due to the lack of eye contact with the performers.

For the situation, students are grouped into small units and given, written or orally, the schema for a particular drama. The same schema may be used for all the groups; creative results are usually as varied as the number of groups. However, a variety of similar "themed situations" may also be assigned. In group, the students construct the plot and its resolution. Strong elements of drama are encouraged as students take charge of both the situation and the language necessary to work the situation. Following a time of preparation, predetermined and announced by the instructor, each group presents their mini-play.

Following the presentations, the resolutions of each drama are discussed and compared. Certain vocabulary words that may appear in the targeted literary text are extracted and highlighted. The instructor parallels the applicable situations to the reading assignments which the students subsequently encounter. Comprehension of the text is facilitated as sensitivity has augmented interest and capability.

Situations applicable to René might be:

1. Your big sister, whom you adore, tells your family that she is moving to a city on the West Coast where she has secured a new job. Students in the group will play the role of parents, siblings, and the sister.
2. You decide that you have had enough of city living, and that you are going to move to the country where you anticipate that all will be blissful.

In this second situation, students may do such things as arrange for the moving company, select a house, talk about leaving old friends, and project the joys of "Mother Nature."

In the country they may choose to fine a leaky roof, unfriendly raccoons and a too distant video store. On the contrary, they may decide that fresh air, flowers and bovine creatures are a delight. The outcome will determine whether the transfer to the text is one of contrast or comparison.

Serious Sillinesses

A second very broadly based category of activities to be applied to the study of literature is what is termed "serious silliness." This myriad of activities is frequently based on "ice-breaker" inter-social devices. The possibilities are endless; the variety and number depend upon one's own creativity, commitment to observing daily life and its relation to the lessons of the literary piece.

Serious sillinesses appear to be most successfully implemented ten to fifteen minutes either at the beginning or the conclusion of class. These activities get the student moving about in the cooperative learning mode, reducing inhibitions and thus increasing the use of L2.

Applied to René, the following are explanations of several serious silliness devices:

1. "Whisper down the lane".

> A variation on the table game "gossip", this activity incorporates practice in both listening and speaking skills.

The class is divided into teams of no more than seven persons. Each team forms a line separated a bit from the other lines so that team members are not privy to other team members' whispers. A quotation from the text such as "Inconnu, je me mêlais á la foule: vaste dessert d'hommes" (Chateaubriand 205) is written. One paper is given to each last person in line. This student may have about thirty seconds to read the sentence. It is more effective to have the quotations from portions already read so that students are more apt to recognize the quote. When the time is announced, the last person in each line may whisper the quote (without benefit of paper) to the person in front of him/her. This procedure will continue until the statement reaches the first person, who will then write what he/she has understood on the board or paper. The first team with the correct quote wins. Numerous quotes may be used to review content.

2. "Time in a bottle"

> Bubbles, although a child-related diversion, are an effective device for producing timed discourse concerning the text.

Students sit in a circle; each student has a turn at blowing bubbles from a bottle. Each student speaks for the duration of the bubbles' existence. Relative to the text, the instructor may assign a sort of "free speak" where the students may speak about anything they remember from the text. This assignment may be used at the beginning of the reading of a larger work. A "continuation" might be required where the first student commences the story of the text and the others follow with correct sequencing. The instructor might also propose various themes from which the student presents certain supportive details, (e.g. *Amélie devient religieuse*, or *la mort d'Amélie*) as their bubbles are in the air.

3. "Statues"

> This is a physical activity which terminates in verbal discourse.

Two students are selected for center stage. Initially, one might choose two students who would feel less sensitive about performing. They are instructed to move about, changing positions, but remaining fairly close to each other (conversation will be produced). Music might serve to gear their movements. After no more than a minute, the students freeze into the final assumed position. They begin a conversation relative to this position and to the content of the literary text. They are thus visually associating the position with the discourse of the text. Amélie may be scolding René for his obsession with the boredom of life; Père Sorel may be extolling the blessings of nature. Following the discussion in the first person, the class may now comment on the statue positions of the two performers, perhaps indicating other possibilities from the text. The discourse has now shifted to the third person. Both content and structure have been actively expanded for the student.

4. "Slices"

> This division of a specific literary passage provides students the opportunity to be engaged in a type of group within a group activity.

A passage of a larger text or a small text in its entirety may be chosen, the text may be cut into as many sections as there will be group divisions within the class. Each group receives a "slice" of the reading not in actual sequence of the text. A certain time is allotted to each group to read and discuss among themselves the content of their particular segment so that they may report orally.

After the allotted time, the groups' attention is drawn to the class as a whole. Each group, called upon at random, presents the significant content of their portion. The class has been instructed to listen intently as they are responsible for the content. At the conclusion of the presentations, the class is requested either together or individually to sequence the presentations. Structurally, the importance of tense, transition words, and tone may be noted.

Six Sombreros

The Six Thinking Hats, Eduard de Bono's color-coded guide for developing critical thinking skills in management, suggests ideas which are especially applicable to a communicative literary-based foreign-language classroom. This is an approach which can be effectively utilized in all levels.

To facilitate the process, the class is divided into five groups. Each group is assigned to treat the portion of the text being read, or a small text in its entirety, according to the appropriate representation of each hat. The assignment may be completed in class or as a homework assignment in which case each group would be responsible for a presentation the following class. Colored hats or colored papers as a type of centerpiece ID for each group visualize the discussion. The colors of the "hats" may be at the discretion of the instructor (de Bono has used white, red, black, yellow, blue, and green).

The "white hat" group is responsible for the facts and details of the reading. They should present any events in chronological order indicating correct sequencing, flashbacks, etc. This group offers no opinions. Theirs is a journalistic approach, and they report first.

The "red hats" students will be concerned with the emotions the feelings offered by the text. They will note the emotional behavior of the characters; they will note their own feelings towards the passage; they will identify what in the text triggered these feelings. Nuances of vocabulary will thus surface as well as the concept of "style" linked with passion or the lack of it in the text.

Those wearing "purple hats" will confirm the negative dimensions in the passage. They will comment on the obvious such as the evil or cunning behavior or the characters; they may note the motivation for such behavior. The idea of fate, natural disaster might surface. This group may also express their own negative feelings concerning the text; they may delineate what they did not like and why. In contrast, the "yellow hats" will be challenged to counterbalance the purple hatters as they reason the author's intent. This group will reflect on any positive feelings evoked from the text.

Green hats, it might seem, have the most interesting task as they are challenged to think creatively about the text. Affirming the actual facts about the passage, they are permitted speculation. They might create alternative conclusions to the story. They might speculate on the various themes of the text; they might consider what would transpire if the story were set in a different locale, at a different time. (René might have found a support group in the suburbs!) Structurally, this discussion will foster the use of conditional tenses and subjunctive moods.

Finally, the blue hat organizes and summarizes the thoughts produced by each of the other groups. This hat cannot be relegated to a group prior to the oral presentations of the other five groups since it will not yet have the information from the other groups. Blue hatters may therefore be all of the class members who have listened to and evaluated the presentations; they may also be designated members from each group who form a blue hat panel. The instructors might even be the blue hat as they draw the thoughts of each group to the necessary focal points. Each student might also become an individual blue hat as instructors assign a written composition or perhaps uses the blue hat position as an individual student test.

Each of the humanistic communicative activities delineated in this presentation heightens the students' interest for the literary text, creates a relationship to the text, and most significantly, provides a solid goal-oriented discourse, simultaneously preserving the study of literature. Also noteworthy is that in addition to their academic and pragmatic value, these activities infuse a great deal of pleasure into the classroom so that students are often surprised when the bell or the watch signals the end of class.

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